

Assistant Secretary Claudia McMurray confers with former colleague and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Steve Johnson.



Department Inner-View

Q&A WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY CLAUDIA A. McMURRAY **BY ROB WILEY**

The problem is huge and growing. Fueled by unchecked demand, the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife parts represents a thriving \$10-billion-a-year black market. Because of wildlife trafficking, many species are literally on the brink of extinction.

Assistant Secretary Claudia McMurray, officially sworn in to head the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs in February, was instrumental last fall in forming the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking. The Coalition, originally consisting of the U.S. government and seven partners, set a goal of focusing public and political attention on these growing threats to global wildlife from poaching and illegal trade.

Original partners included Conservation International, Save the Tiger Fund, Traffic

International, WildAid, Wildlife Conservation Society, the Smithsonian Institution and the American Forest & Paper Association. Four more nongovernmental organizations quickly joined as partners in the fall of 2005—the Humane Society International, Cheetah Conservation Fund, International Fund for Animal Welfare and the World Wildlife Fund. Early in 2006, the United Kingdom and India officially joined as government partners.

The Coalition is focusing its initial efforts on Asia. Backed by funding from OES, the Thai government last fall hosted a regional wildlife trafficking workshop at a national game preserve. The workshop included representatives from the 10 ASEAN countries and the People's Republic of China. The meeting was the

first step toward establishing an ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network, a regional trafficking law enforcement network that will serve as a model for other regions.

The Coalition fits well with Assistant Secretary McMurray's bureau, where the OES professionals do the gritty, grinding work that protects real natural and strategic resources around the planet. They negotiate the treaties, hammer out the multilateral agreements and agonize over just the right words that bind nations and people to protecting their environments.

And that's just part of the bureau's portfolio. Other professionals among the bureau's three major directorates and nine offices work on international health issues and cooperation with other nations on science, technology, bioterrorism and the use of outer space.

The bureau's mandate ranges far and wide, and Assistant Secretary McMurray came to the bureau well prepared. She spent two years as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment, where she managed international environmental issues and wildlife and national resource conservation issues. Before joining the Department in 2003, she served as Associate Deputy Administrator and Chief of Staff to the Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

She also held several key staff positions in the United States Senate, including serving as a senior policy advisor and counsel to three senators—Fred Thompson, R-Tenn.; John Chafee, R-R.I.; and John Warner, R-Va. From 1991 through 1995, Assistant Secretary McMurray was Republican Counsel to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. In that capacity, she advised Committee Chairman Chafee on key environmental issues, including the Clean Air Act, Superfund, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, Toxic Substances and Control Act and the Oil Pollution Act.

Private industry experience includes stops at D.C. government relations firm Van Scoyoc Associates; and law firms Patton Boggs, L.L.P. and Kirkland & Ellis. She also ran her own consulting firm, McMurray & Associates.

In late March, Assistant Secretary McMurray discussed her bureau's portfolio with *State Magazine*.

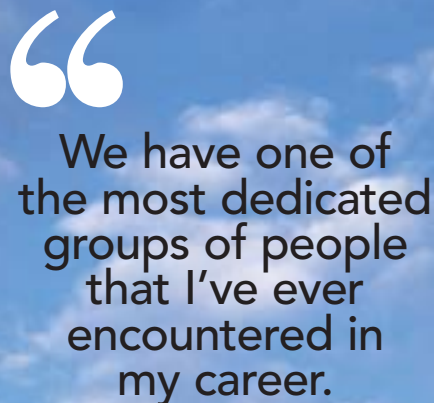
SM: *The Department is active in several environmental areas. What can you tell me about Department initiatives or programs in, for example, global climate change?*

Assistant Secretary McMurray: I'm happy to do that. The work this bureau does internationally is an untold story in a lot of ways, not only in other countries but also in our own country. I'm committed to remedying that, and I want to get the message out in the Department. A lot of what we do falls below the radar screen.

As you know, we have decided to pursue an alternative path to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Bush administration decided early on that this was not a path we were going to take, partly because there was no hope that the Congress would ratify this treaty. Our job, therefore, was to figure out how to address the issues raised by climate change and all the inter-related issues—energy use, air

pollution and so on—without joining this treaty.

We have accomplished a great deal, but I'll mention just a couple of initiatives. We announced in January the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate between the U.S. and five other countries—Australia, China, India, Japan and the Republic of Korea. We tried to gather the most crucial countries that contribute to carbon dioxide emissions, energy use and air pollution. We brought these



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countries together to figure out technologically how to solve these problems.”

What's notable about the Asia Pacific Partnership is the engagement of China and India; all the parties to the Kyoto Protocol have not been able to get those two countries to work within the Protocol in the way that we have through the APP. We look at our effort as complementary to Kyoto, but we also think engaging those countries is groundbreaking. They are growing tremendously, they are looking for cleaner energy and they are trying to solve pollution problems.

A second initiative, called Methane to Markets, is quite creative. Under this initiative, the United States shares its expertise with countries around the world in a very specific way. Methane is a greenhouse gas; it has some other environmental problems, but the big concern is the greenhouse gas. We've established technologies in the United States that take methane from landfills and from other industrial facilities and actually translate it into energy. It not only takes the pollutant out of the air, but it also is a renewable source of energy. You get two bangs for the buck.

We're trying to share that technology, primarily with developing countries and

with others, so they can use it to address their own energy concerns.

We also have a huge list of bilateral diplomatic initiatives, too many to mention here. We have one team that does nothing but this work, and they work very hard. This is an important part of our work here.

SM: *Were your people involved in the recent presidential trip to India and the proposed agreement on nuclear energy that came out of that trip?*

Assistant Secretary McMurray: Actually, I was in India two weeks before the president arrived, helping a bigger Department team that included Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky, Under Secretary Nicholas Burns and other administration officials. We worked to get the list of items finalized for the summit between the prime minister and the president.

Obviously and appropriately, most of the attention has been focused on the groundbreaking nuclear initiative. However, we did some other things that probably haven't received as much attention but are still important.

First, the Department has a long history with India on natural resource conservation, in particular wildlife conservation. We saw this trip as a big opportunity to take that commitment to the next level. We saw a particular opportunity in issues involving the Bengal Tiger. Indian Park officials have had troubles keeping those tigers in their country. They are being killed and traded illegally. Some of them are coming to the United States illegally.

We took this opportunity to focus on that issue and then to look more broadly at their parks, considering the potential for attracting new tourism to India that would encourage more wildlife conservation. It was a very broad initiative that the President and the Prime Minister agreed to in their summit, and we're really proud of getting that over the finish line.

A second item involves science and technology. Again, we've had a long-standing cooperative relationship with India on science, and we wanted to take that one step further. We established a seed-money fund, \$15 million from each country, as an endowment that will focus on a number of scientific initiatives. Whether it's in biotechnology or pharmaceuticals, we thought our two countries could put our best minds to work and actually improve the lives of Americans and Indians.

SM: *What about your bureau's role in free-trade agreements?*

Assistant Secretary McMurray: Free-trade agreements actually allow us to be creative. The Congress a long time ago said if we were going to have free-trade agreements with other countries, we should make sure that we don't compromise the environment.

OES negotiates what we call "environmental cooperation agreements" that go hand-in-hand with the overall free-trade agreement. We sit down with our new trading partners and determine their priorities. Some tell us they need an environment ministry. Others say they have good environmental laws but can't enforce them. Some mention specific problems, such as losing sea turtles.

We can go in almost any direction while working with our new trading partners. We have the opportunity to do two things: follow the congressional mandate to not harm the environment with increased trading activity or increased manufacturing, and go a bit further. We aren't satisfied in maintaining the status quo; we actually push forward and give these countries the opportunity to improve their environmental situation.

Congress has just earmarked \$40 million for labor and environment activity under the Central American Free Trade Agreement trade agreement, and we're working on environmental cooperation agreements with six countries in Central America and the Dominican Republic. We won't get all of that money, but we hope to get a good portion of it to further our cooperation agreements.

SM: *What role does the Department take in conserving global marine resources?*

Assistant Secretary McMurray: The U.S. is a leader in preventing illegal activity in fishing and also in protecting species like sea turtles, whales and other marine mammals. There are countless treaties where we are in the forefront of preserving those natural resources. That's an important part of our environmental agenda. This bureau negotiates those treaties. Sometimes the Commerce Department will take the lead because of its expertise, but in most cases we lead the U.S. delegation in these negotiations.

SM: *OES issues are all over the map. How do you set priorities with such a broad mandate?*

Assistant Secretary McMurray: I thought a lot about this during the confirmation process because it is a daunting array of issues. Here's how I boiled it down. It may not be the perfect way, but it's how I deal with my job every day. There are a couple of issues that are out there that we have to deal with head on. One is climate change and the other is avian influenza. Those are just facts of life. There they are; they are important and I think about each one of them every day.

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For both of those issues, Under Secretary Dobriansky is very much the point person, but I'm on her team and I support her in every way I can. There's plenty of work to do not only for the Under Secretary, but also for the people in our bureau and the other folks who are working on avian influenza.

In addition to the top two, we are parties to international legal obligations and are observers in other cases. We are parties to more than 100 treaties and agreements, and we have to continue to honor our obligations. Some people might say that's probably more than enough work, but I don't approach it that way. There are some things we want to do that aren't obligations. We want to provide leadership in those areas. When we have some extra time, we try to pick a few issues to focus on.

I've asked our deputy assistant secretaries to form teams on a couple of areas. One is the Arctic, an area that is changing now and has the potential to change quite a bit in the future. It has environmental issues; it has commercial fishing and other issues related to oil and gas development;

and it has endangered species from the polar bear on down. Pretty much every part of this bureau has some bit of the Arctic portfolio. There's a tremendous amount of excitement in the bureau about looking at the Arctic, and it's another opportunity to be a little more creative.

Literally, there's something in the newspaper every day that this bureau deals with, whether it's protecting polar bears, space or Global Positioning System satellites.

That's a big plateful with a lot of different courses, but the opportunities are really enormous.

SM: *Your portfolio also includes oversight of the Department's role in "sustainable development." Can you explain the Department's role in implementing sustainable development throughout the world?*

Assistant Secretary McMurray: You can talk to 10 different people about sustainable development and get 10 slightly different definitions, but I do think there is a core principle: how do you promote economic growth and improve people's lives economically, but at the same time not harm the environment? Some people say you have to leave the environment better than it was. I think sustainable means that you make sure our abundant natural resources are available to the next generation.

It's a challenge, but it's behind our search for cleaner sources of energy. All of these pieces together make up this whole that hopefully promotes better drinking water, better air and water, better sources of food and better livelihoods.

There was a watershed moment on this topic in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. It was a call to action from the United States, joined by a lot of other countries, that said we're looking at poverty, at air pollution and at water pollution, and we need to make a concerted effort to address them all as a comprehensive whole rather than as single issues here and there. Instead of just sitting around a table and negotiating a piece of paper that may or may not ever have any meaning to a human, we put out the challenge to actually get on the ground and do the work, and try to translate the goal into something more immediate.

We came out of Johannesburg with at least 10 to 15 partnerships—we've probably gone beyond that to about 20 now—to deal with these sustainable development issues, whether it's bringing drinking water



Top: Battling illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife parts is a big part of the OES agenda. Here, Assistant Secretary McMurray gains first-hand experience at a gorilla rehabilitation reserve near Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. Bottom: Before Secretary Rice swore her in as Assistant Secretary, Ms. McMurray served as the Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment.

to remote areas in Africa, changing the way people heat their homes or combating illegal trade in trees, wildlife or fish. There was an array of really creative ideas that didn't just come from us, but from other countries, too. I think it's been a really great example of global partnership.

SM: *We understand part of ensuring sustainable development is conserving natural resources. How is OES involved in that worldwide effort?*

Assistant Secretary McMurray: Let's look at illegal logging as an example. We battle illegal logging around the world under the Presidential Initiative Against Illegal Logging, which is an umbrella program that allows us to combat the illegal trade in timber. Some of what we're dealing with is a violation of international agreements, some of it is lack of enforcement of national laws and some of it involves countries that just don't have laws.

We formed the Congo Basin Forest Partnership under this umbrella. The Congo Basin is second only to the Amazon Basin on most lists of the world's most valuable areas in terms of forestry, wildlife or just natural bounty. It's also an area of extreme poverty, and one of the ways they were growing economically in the Congo Basin was to cut down trees like mad and sell them. There were a lot of concerns about the threat to natural resources that went on in the name of economic growth.

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership came out of the 2002 Johannesburg summit. It made sense to look at the six countries in the area because natural resources don't necessarily stop at manmade borders. Through the U.S. Agency for International Development, we have put in about \$50 million on this effort. I think we'll start to see some real results in the next two or three years, either forests that have been preserved or individual species that will come back. It's a really

good story.

We were also successful in Liberia, where government corruption was literally denuding the country's forests. This bureau actually led the successful effort to get UN sanctions imposed on Liberia to stop this trade from happening. The sanctions are still in place, but the new president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, recently asked President Bush to lift the sanctions. She thinks they now have a management plan in place that would preserve the resources but allow some forestry to occur so there's economic growth for that country. The UN Security Council must decide whether to lift the sanctions, but we're obviously a key player because it was our initiative. We want to stay on the ground and help them through this transition period to make sure they don't slip back.

SM: *All these responsibilities require a huge range of intellectual capability. How do*

you recruit that much talent and how to you keep it once you have it?

Assistant Secretary McMurray: Those are all real challenges. Once I got here and looked at the really breathtaking array of issues, I found you have to have a combination of two kinds of people.

One, you really do need to have the people with the substantive expertise to get through some really technical issues. These are not easy issues. Some of them deal with chemicals and some with how a tree grows. I think we have more Civil Service employees in this bureau than probably in any other, at least in the building, as a proportion of the total in the bureau. We need to keep those people because you just can't send somebody to a chemical meeting who's never dealt with these issues before.

We focus on having a good cadre of civil servants who have the opportunity to move up. I'm working on that; it's not that easy here right now. We have a lot of people at the top of the ladder and not a lot of space to move more people up, but we're working on that.

Then we draw on people from other places quite a bit. Sometimes, I actually have stolen a couple of people that I knew before at EPA. We've gotten some real good people that way; I know in the oceans area we've had people come from other agencies.

We use every other resource at our disposal, like science fellows from the American Association for the Advancement of Science. We take in 12 or so science fellows every year on a temporary basis, but once they get here many find that they like the issues. If we like them, we try to find a spot for them. We use interns, other kinds of fellows and details from other agencies, as well.

I have four deputy assistant secretary positions in this front office, and when my whole team gets assembled, you'll see those positions all filled from inside the Department. I'm told that's probably unprecedented. I'm trying to communicate that there are real opportunities for leadership here, and if you stick around, you might be able to move up.

I think we have one of the most dedicated groups of people that I've ever encountered in my career. It's crucial to get people who are already enthusiastic, and then to keep that enthusiasm going along with the notion that we're all working together on some really important issues. ■

The author is the editor of State Magazine.